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Distrust in the Wake of Dallas

WEST LAKE, La.—If you're interested in a roving report on national reaction to President Kennedy's assassination and its aftermath, here it is:

In some 4000 miles of travel in the past six weeks, I did not encounter one single person who believed he or she had been told the real truth.

Some, of course, blamed the news media. But these were in the minority and they mostly were merely repeating an old tune with new words.

Most of those questioned indicated a complete lack of faith in the official reports on the case—the reports by public officials as well as those by the law enforcement officers involved.

This was a cumulative thing which had almost escaped me until I came home for the week end to sit on the river bank and look over my notes.

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Then, page after page, from state after state, I found notes and quotes of distrust and suspicion about the whole Dallas episode.

And when I started thinking back I couldn't think of a single person who wasn't at the very least uneasy about whether the real truth had been told.

There were some who felt that there might be good national security reasons for withholding at least part of the story. But even they were troubled about it.

The fantastic theories that were advanced in many quarters as fact would shake even the Warren commission.

Some were absolutely certain that the whole thing grew out of the Cuban situation.

Others said that the recent lessening of tensions between Washington and Moscow explained it all.

And both of those plots had differing sets of villains.

From there on, the imaginations ran riot. Naturally, the upcoming Presidential election entered into many stories—and they were told with such conviction that the tellers obviously were convinced they were true.

They were certain the whole thing was politics, and they differed only as to which party's politics.

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Almost all the stories, if told in detail, would be libelous. And some of them would come close to inciting treason.

They really had only one thing in common, and perhaps that is the real story:

All of them clearly distrusted the official reports. Off hand, I cannot recall any time, in peace or war, when this was such a universal reaction.

Perhaps it is the atmosphere that naturally follows an assassination. But it is a frightening thing—like a room filled with explosive gas.

The Warren commission has an awesome responsibility, possibly one that even its members do not yet fully comprehend.

Where are all these people?